



## WARBY RANGE LANDCARE & RABBIT CONTROL GROUP

28<sup>th</sup> January 2009

**Attention: Senator Anne McEwen**  
**Chair Standing Committee on Environment, Communication and the Arts**  
**PO Box 6100**  
**Parliament House**  
**CANBERRA ACT 2600**

**Dear Senator McEwen,**

RE: Submission to the Standing Committee on the Environment, Community and the Arts

At a specially convened meeting on Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> January 2009, interested members of the Warby Range Landcare Group discussed the proposed amendments to the Water Act 2007 – known as the *Water Amendment (Saving the Goulburn and Murray Rivers) Act 2008*.

In general the group agreed that the principle of ***taking water from one catchment to another should be avoided at all costs***. The group felt that this was not an ecologically sustainable practice and merely resulted in moving water for political gain. As a guiding principle, we as a society must learn to live within our means, from the domestic level, through the catchment level right up to a global level. We must try to understand the hydrological requirements of rivers and communities and learn to balance these in a sustainable manner. Pumping water from one catchment to another is not sustainable; it is wasteful of energy resource and only serves to add to a community's carbon and ecological footprint.

In relation to the specific amendments:

**Amendment 2** after subsection 18(H)1 - in relation to "... as soon as saved water becomes available, the water must be allocated to the Living Murray initiative...."

We were in broad agreement with this amendment with the proviso that consideration must be given to Urban, Stock and Domestic requirements in drought declared areas within the basin. It seems pointless to return flows to the rivers at the exclusion of human requirements. When human requirements conflict with the requirements of the environment, human needs must take precedence. The

important premise of stream flow management is to prevent this conflict ever happening. It is merely a symptom of poor planning.

**Amendment 3** at the end of section 21- in relation to “Basin plan not to permit taking water for additional uses outside Basin”

We strongly support this amendment for several reasons.

- (a) It is imperative for sustainable ecology to retain water within natural catchments. The long term cost of failing to do this will be an imposition on future generations and may be too much for them to bear. We must solve our problems here and now, not trade them away for later treatment.
- (b) Food production in the Goulburn and Murray valleys will be jeopardized if this is not put in place. We will not be able to continue to solve our food shortage problems through importation. The current preferential pricing of imported products is merely a manifestation of the poor social and environmental management of the countries we import from. This is unsustainable as the “carbon cost” of this will become too great and we are really only shifting our environmental footprint off-shore, not alleviating it.
- (c) Insufficient work has been done on projected growth figures of regional centres with the 2 basins and the hydrological requirements to sustain those communities. This is important for decentralizations and to alleviate the pressure on resources in capital cities.
- (d) It is imperative that water remains in these basins and that we learn to enhance and manage the storages on those systems better to ensure we can meet all future requirement – environmental, social and economic. Taking water out of these basins only provides short term solutions to extremely complex and convoluted problems.

**Amendment 4** at the end of Part 12 – in relation to “Prohibited water infrastructure operations”

We support this amendment. We do not agree with building any infrastructure, for whatever reasons that could at some time in the future be used to remove water from the Goulburn and Murray Rivers.

## **Conclusion**

The water issues in our area are unique and typical of the national picture that is driving the current reform of water policy.

- (a) We have rivers, the Ovens and the King, that have inadequate storages on them so that their water can be used in the Murray for irrigation and environmental flows. We find this most galling as it means irrigators on the Ovens and King have their security curtailed so that those on the Murray may be enhanced. As already stated, we believe, as a matter of principle, that “*taking water from one catchment to another should be avoided at all costs*”. There is an ever increasing

amount of evidence that shows water is more productive when used closer to its source. There is more production, better economic return and less wastage and therefore more available for environmental management.

- (b) One of our storages, Lake Mokoan, is facing decommissioning, to return flows to the Murray and the Snowy. This will mean that water rights in the Broken Valley will need to be purchased to meet the objectives of this project. This will equate to the loss of at least \$20 mill p.a. in farm production and the attendant 3:1 flow on in terms of net economic effect. This is another example of short term decision making to gain votes with little regard for the rural communities affected, food production or net environmental effect.
- (c) Most of the water in the Murray and Goulburn Rivers arises from the mountains in the North East of which we are a part. Farmers in this area are becoming increasingly alarmed at the mismanagement of “their water” and are demanding a better water management system.

For these reasons we invite the Senate Standing Committee investigating these amendments to visit our area to see these issues first hand. We would welcome the opportunity to put our submission to them in person.

Thank you for your time and the consideration of our submission,

Yours sincerely,

Jeff Colson

ACTING SECRETARY